

In the preface to the *Method*, by the late Rev. T. H. Gallan-
 bet, published some years later, the author (whose opportunities to as-
 certain the laws of the human mind as well as of language) were very
 rare; and what can be more interesting than to compare with
 teaching a child to read, certain scientific modes, or letters, which in
 themselves have no meaning, in various ways, or names, or
 the letters, which when read have no meaning. What an intelligible and
 tedious task it must be! It is not strange that some very bright boys
 and girls, who can see no meaning in the names of letters, and
 and a boy, a girl, and who take no interest in it because they are
 fond of finding out a reason for what they do, should do so. When
 of finding out a reason for what they do, should do so. When
 of finding out a reason for what they do, should do so. When

CIRCULAR

[TO ACCOMPANY THE BIBLE READER.]

AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
 1122 CHESTNUT STREET, PHILADELPHIA.

Those who propose important changes in established customs must
 anticipate strenuous opposition. There is a familiar story of a country
 boy on his way to mill with a bag thrown over the back of his horse,
 having the grain in one end and a rock in the other to balance it.
 Being admonished that it was useless to carry that additional weight,
 when he might just as well put half the grain on either side, he replied,
 "What yer says looks reasonable,—it does,—but Dad always went to mill
 so, and I reckon I may as well." That exceedingly useful and man-
 ageable agent, steam, when first applied to some of its most important
 uses, was regarded with no little suspicion. When gas was about to
 be introduced into one of our cities, some of the large tax-payers and
 real estate owners threatened to sell their property and remove from
 the city—so confident were they that desolating fires and terrific
 explosions would be the inevitable consequence. Passenger rail-roads
 were opposed as a monstrous innovation on the proper use of streets,
 and pregnant with obstacles and disasters to all ordinary vehicles.
 Yet, who would not sorely feel the privation were steam, gas, or pas-
 senger cars abolished?

In few departments of civilized economy has there been sterner oppo-
 sition to "innovations" (as they are called) than in our systems of public
 education. We do not refer to school buildings, in the construction and
 arrangement of which there have been, in some districts, very great im-
 provements. "Innovations" upon the selection of sites, and upon former
 processes for heating, lighting, ventilating and seating school-houses
 have been tolerated and sometimes welcomed. Normal schools for
 teachers have had their influence in elevating the profession, and
 imparting more just views of its duties and responsibilities; and
 where a love of teaching has been brought under culture in such
 schools, the advantages conferred by them are eminently valuable.
 As to school books, if the improvement in their character and adapta-
 tion had borne any appreciable proportion to the multiplication of
 their number, we should have passed the point of perfection long ago.
 This is not the place to expose the shameful impositions often practiced
 on the community by the makers, publishers and vendors of school-
 books. It will be done, however, when the abuses become a little
 more aggravated. Our present business is with the *method of teaching*
 —and that not of elementary branches in general, but the primary
 branch of *READING*. If our senses do not deceive us respecting schools
 we have seen, and if our information is reliable respecting those we
 have not seen, the mode of teaching children to read, in a vast major-
 ity of the primary schools of the country, is very much the same as it
 was fifty years ago. If four is the age at which our "future sove-
 reigns" begin their educational career, they are expected, in the first
 place, to sit still during school hours with their arms folded across
 their breast six or twelve months, except that at fixed intervals they
 are summoned to the teacher's knee, where they find a book or a card

Is this process necessary? We think not. Miss Agnew, in her
 day thought not. It was clear to her that "mimicry" of the labor
 and disgust of learning to read may be avoided, and that instead of
 flowers and tears,—the usual badges of learning,—contentment and
 smiles may initiate pupils in the most efficient of all human
 attainments. Let us see.
 Suppose we go back to "the place of beginning," as the survivors
 say, and instead of the book or card upon the left, direct the attention
 of all the little boys and girls in the class to a tablet suspended near
 on which are printed in large letters such characters as these—



on which are printed the mysterious signs which we call letters. The
 teacher, to whom the card lies upside down, points with a pencil or a
 pair of scissors to one of them, (not always the right one,) saying in a
 loud voice, "S' that?"—by which she means "what's that?" After a
 few days' drilling the pupil learns to say *a*, when the pointer is at a
 particular object. How many weary weeks are passed before these
 twenty-six marks are so learned and digested as to be told at a glance,
 depends on various graces and faculties in both the teacher and pupil.
 But there comes a time, sooner or later, when a new leaf is turned over,
 or a new card-face is presented, on which the mysteries that have been
 so long dwelt upon are combined into other and equally mysterious
 forms, and at the same knee and with the same pointer, the abused
 child is called to look upon *a* and *b* together. The two are individu-
 ally familiar, but their combination is the mystery. After a few more
 weeks or months the long, stiff columns of *ab* and *ba*, *ee* and *ce* are
 mastered, and the admiring pupil is introduced to the family of *words*,
 first of one syllable, each in its simple, native individuality, though
 with some intimation in sound that they might bear a remote rela-
 tion to each other as second or third cousins—but, *put*, *shut*, *tut*, *gut*,
jut, &c., &c., are specimens of the class. Thus they pass from stage
 to stage, year in and year out, till they arrive at the grand point
 which all this meaningless drudgery is to conduct them, to wit, a *read-
 ing lesson*.

Is this process necessary? We think not. Miss Edgeworth in her day thought not. It was clear to her that "nine-tenths of the labour and disgust of learning to read may be avoided, and that instead of frowns and tears,—the usual harbingers of learning,—cheerfulness and smiles may initiate willing pupils in the most difficult of all human attainments." Let us see.

Suppose we go back to "the place of beginning," (as the surveyors say,) and instead of the book or card upon the lap, direct the attention of all the little boys and girls in the class to a tablet suspended near, on which are printed in large letters such characters as these—

that ran John off this
one a and day and had
this John a off had one
day ran dog off that

Now let the teacher point to the word *dog*, repeating the word distinctly, and making all the class repeat it after him. Then let each of the children point to the same word in another place, and so pass from a word in one place to the same word in another, back and forth, on the tablet, till it is familiar. Proceeding in this way till the eleven words are thoroughly learned, (a task quite as easily accomplished as learning eleven letters of the alphabet,) the class is prepared for the first reading lesson, thus—

John had a dog, and this dog that John had ran off one day.

When the surprise and exultation produced by this achievement have subsided, let a similar collection of words be taken—as for example:

thy give unto O thing
name is thanks Lord
High good thing Most
God O name good give
Sing it unto praises
is praises give thy
Lord High sing it thanks

And when these become, in like manner, familiar, introduce the class to the second and more attractive reading lesson—

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High.

Then show them the same words in the first verse of Psalm xciii, and let them each read it there, and then go home and read it to an admiring circle there!

These examples will suffice to illustrate the principle of what is called the "Word Method," or a mode of teaching persons to read the English language by first making them acquainted with words, and leaving them to learn the power of letters incidentally, as they inevitably will.

It is superfluous to say that the "Word Method" is no recent invention. In 1837 the American Sunday School Union published their *Union-Primer*, and the next year the *Union Spelling Book*, both substantially on this principle. In the same year, a publishing house in Boston put out a volume of 112 pages 18mo., entitled, "My First School Book, to teach me with the help of my instructor to read and spell words and understand them. (By a friend of mine.)" In the preface to this ingenious little work, "all that is insisted upon is that the learning of the word should precede that of the letters, and for this plain reason—it is the natural order, and therefore must be incomparably easier than the reverse."

In the preface to the *Mother's Primer*, by the late Rev. T. H. Gallaudet, published some years later, the author (whose opportunities to ascertain the laws of the human mind as well as of language, were very rare) asks "what can be more uninteresting than to commence with teaching a child to call certain arbitrary marks, or letters, which in themselves have no meaning, by certain arbitrary sounds, or names of the letters, which also have no meaning. What an unintelligible and irksome task it must be! Is it not strange that some very bright boys and girls, who can see no meaning in the usual mode of learning *a b c*, and *a b ab, e b eh, &c.*, and who take no interest in it because they are fond of finding out a reason for what they do, should be set down as blockheads? Yet, it often happens that these blockheads, as they are called at the beginning, show afterwards that the difficulty was not in them, but in the mode of teaching them. The author cannot but hope, that this book will enable many a mother, or aunt, or elder brother or sister,—or perhaps a beloved grandmother, by the family fireside, to go through, in a pleasant and sure way, with the whole art and mystery of learning to read."

The example which Mr. G. furnishes is worth citing, as it presents the peculiarities of the mode of teaching in a very simple way.



The teacher is supposed to say to the child, pointing to the first picture, "What is that? Do you know his name? I wonder if he has a name. Suppose we call him *Frank*." O there is his name right under him," pointing to the whole word, *Frank*, but not to the letters. "No, thing is yet to be said about letters. Here is his name again. And here it is again. And here it is once more. What is that?" Pointing to the other picture. "Perhaps it is *Frank's* sister. What is her name? O here is her name. It is *Jane*. Can you show me her name again?—again—once more. Repeat till the child can tell the words readily."

Of the success of this method of teaching, Mr. G. received gratifying evidence from an unexpected quarter. An American missionary in China wrote him as follows:—"We have four classes in a school of thirty-five boys, and one of them has made a fair trial of the *Primer*. They commenced the study of the English language with it, and the consequence is that they have acquired the art of reading more readily and accurately than those who were, for the want of such a book, put upon the old course of learning to read. The remarks you have made in the preface to this little book in reference to the absurdity of teaching children to read by letters are doubly true, when considered in relation to a school like this."

It would be foreign from the purpose of this circular to enter more in detail upon the peculiarities and advantages of the method on which "The Bible Reader" is constructed, but we do not esteem it extravagant to say that were it generally and intelligently introduced

into the public primary schools, into mission Sunday-schools, and into adult schools (evening or day) for instruction in the art of reading, it would revolutionize the intellectual condition of the country. If in the Providence of God the opportunity should occur to instruct large bodies of men and women, hitherto kept in ignorance of the art of reading, such a simple and expeditious method would be of inestimable importance. But we cannot enlarge. Let it suffice to say that by its proper use, children or adults of ordinary capacity can be prepared to read the Sacred Scriptures intelligently to themselves and others in one tenth part of the time usually (and perhaps necessarily) employed for that purpose, where the prevailing method is in use. The time allowed to multitudes of children for school purposes is so restricted as to oblige us to make the most of it if we would not have them grow up in ignorance; but the wants of ADULT LEARNERS have entered more into the author's view than the wants of children.

As a book to put the art of reading within easy reach of adults, the Bible Reader is invaluable. To many adults, the very thought of subjecting themselves to the protracted and tedious process usually employed with children is an insuperable barrier to any attempt of the kind. But if we show them that a few hours given to the subject, instead of years or months, would accomplish the desired object, they would generally embrace the opportunity with eagerness.

The number of grown men and women in our country who cannot read a verse in the Bible intelligibly, is appalling. The returns on the subject are, of course, very imperfect, as an acknowledgment of ignorance is very reluctantly made; nevertheless, the known number is reckoned by HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS of whites, and a still larger proportion of blacks. What we have to do to enlighten existing ignorance and prevent its increase we must do quickly, and hence the vast importance we attach to the "Word Method," as applied to them.

That those into whose hands this circular falls may be apprised of the views entertained of this system by practical teachers, we append a few extracts showing the opinions of writers and authors who have most thoroughly examined it.

From Professor Phelps, Principal of the State Normal School, Trenton, New Jersey.

Having been favored with the opportunity of carefully examining the proof-sheets and the plan of "The Bible Reader," and cards accompanying the same, I take great pleasure in recommending them to the Superintendents and teachers of Sunday-schools, parents, and, indeed, all who are interested (and who is not?) in securing not only to the young, but to the destitute of all ages, the power of reading the Bible in the shortest possible time.

"The Bible Reader" and cards are based on what is popularly known as the "Word Method" of learning to read. This method is too well understood and too highly appreciated to require special commendation. This is the first aid to religious instruction upon this excellent plan which has come under my notice, and I feel confident that parents and teachers will find on trial that it vastly abridges the time and labour of acquiring a knowledge of the art of reading, so essential to the welfare and happiness of all.

From an Address of Hon. George P. Marsh, author of "Lectures on the English Language," and now United States Minister at Turin.

We look at a written word, not as a succession of articulations truly represented by the orthography, but as a diagram consisting of certain lines, curves and angles, which, like the Chinese characters, stand for a certain spoken word. It is not a chain of elementary sounds, but an entire symbol, and is fixed in the memory with all its parts as a single whole.

From the Preface to Webb's Normal Reader No. 1, one of a series of Readers used in many of our Public Schools.

It is a lamentable fact, and one which the community is beginning to understand, that children have been wrongly taught their first lessons in reading. The children have been taught to say the letters in words, and say the words, and then say off the words one after another without understanding the meaning of one of them, or even dreaming that they had any.

It may be asked by some, why we have commenced with words instead of letters. We answer, a word can as easily be learned as a letter; and in addition, a word has some meaning—a letter none. A word conveys to the mind an idea, the mind acts to receive it; the letter has no such effect. The former necessarily teaches a child to think; the latter teaches—nothing. Besides, experience has shown that the object of this book is much more readily obtained by the method we have pursued than by those heretofore employed.

Again, in the "Directions for Teaching," the author writes in regard to Part I. of the Reader, as follows:—

"The child, in this part, is not to be taught a letter, or to spell a word, but is simply to learn the words by their forms, the same as he learns the names of animals by looking at them as a whole—as an animal—associating the name with its form. The child, thus reads naturally, by sight, the same as all persons read."

Note A. Some teachers prefer teaching spelling and the letters, at the same time they teach the words. These teachers first teach the word by its form, then teach the child to spell it, after which they teach the forms of the letters, or, in other words, the letters.

To this method we will not object, though we decidedly prefer that marked out in "Directions for Teaching."

To understand the alphabet requires more thought than to understand the general principles of arithmetic.

From the Preface to "Willson's First Reader," a new illustrated book, published by Harper and Brothers, New York.

Children may be taught to call words at sight as well as letters. They should begin to read at the same time they begin to learn the alphabet.

Do not let them spell out the words at first. Pronounce the sentences for them, and require them as they read to imitate you.

From "Education, Intellectual, Moral and Physical, by Herbert Spencer. Page 103.

All modern authorities condemn the old mechanical way of teaching the alphabet. In the acquirement of languages the old grammar-school plan is superseded by plans based on the spontaneous process followed by the child in gaining its mother tongue.

Extract of a Letter to the Author from Frank W. Ballard, Esq., of New York, Feb. 14, 1862.

"I am sincerely sorry that such a book has not sooner been got ready for the thousands of soldiers who know well enough how to fight, but who cannot read. And in the hospital wards, I have often met with poor fellows who would have welcomed the chance to learn were it only to forget their wounds. I hope the Sunday-School Union will hasten its publication, and give it thorough newspaper ventilation in advance."

